

King County Women's Program

Report No. 96-03 -- Executive Summary

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Women's Program and the Women's Advisory Board were established by ordinance in 1978 to "foster programs, legislation and policies for the benefit of women in King County."

At the time of the audit, the Women's Program was located in the Community Services Division of the Department of Community and Human Services, and was staffed by a full-time Program Coordinator, a half-time Contract Monitor, and .33 full-time equivalent Office Technician.

Women's Program services were provided through contracts with community-based agencies. Contracts fell within the following major program areas:

- Domestic violence services;
- Batterers' treatment;
- Sexual assault services; and
- Women's Advisory Board demonstration projects

Women's Program staff were responsible for administering and monitoring these contracts and coordinating service provision across contract agencies, jurisdictions, and County agencies. They also provided staff support to the Women's Advisory Board.

The Women's Advisory Board funded demonstration projects that met its annual funding priorities. Funding priorities in 1995 included economic self-sufficiency for women, teen domestic violence, support for women leaving the sex industry, and a needs assessment of women in King County. The size of the Board was set by ordinance at fifteen members: one nominated by each Councilmember and two nominated by the Executive.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the audit was to review the Women's Program and determine if it was functioning efficiently and effectively as intended by the legislation establishing the Program.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The general conclusion of the audit was that the Women's Program and the Women's Advisory Board were not fulfilling all of the broad advisory, advocacy, and policy roles specified in the enabling ordinance, due primarily to the accrual of ongoing program areas since the legislation was written.

MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding II-A - The Women's Program and the Women's Advisory Board were not fulfilling all of the roles in the County Code.

The Code gave broad advocacy, advisory, and policy roles to both the Program and the Board. However, the roles of each had changed since the legislation was written, due to the addition of ongoing program areas and contracts to the Women's Program.

When the Women's Program and Women's Advisory Board were created, the Program had \$28,500 budgeted for contract services, which were all Women's Advisory Board projects. By 1995, with the addition of sexual assault services, services for victims of domestic violence, batterers' treatment, and former Council Special Programs, contract services totaled over \$1.6 million. Women's Advisory Board projects accounted for only 8% of that amount.

Consequently, the objectives of the Program and the Board had diverged. The focus of the Women's Program had become administration and coordination of the increasing number of contracts. The Women's Advisory Board continued to fund its demonstration projects and no longer acted in an advisory capacity to the Program. As their objectives diverged, the Program and the Board moved away from some of the broader roles in the Code.

Finding II-B - Although its role was limited to funding demonstration projects, the Board was fulfilling in part its role in the County Code.

The Women's Advisory Board's role had become limited mainly to funding demonstration projects, rather than the broad roles of the Code. However, the Board was fulfilling part of the role envisioned in the Code through projects that identified emerging needs of women in the County. Some recent Board projects were in the areas of teen dating violence, teen pregnancy prevention, and support for women leaving the sex industry.

The audit recommended that the Executive propose an ordinance delineating the roles and responsibilities of the Women's Program and the Women's Advisory Board. The ordinance should clarify the relationship between the Program and the Board and specify the responsibilities to be assumed by each.

Finding II-C - Low membership and diminished staff support limited the Women's Advisory Board's ability to meet the roles in the County Code.

The Women's Advisory Board had been operating with low membership since 1993, and for two months in 1995 did not have enough members to make a quorum. Low membership also slowed down the amount of work the Board could conduct and frustrated Board members. The Board was also hampered by poor communication from the Community Services Division, and by diminished staff support from the Women's Program as the number of personnel in the Women's Program decreased.

The audit recommended that the Community Services Division work to improve communication

with the Women's Advisory Board. The audit also recommended that if the Council wanted the Women's Advisory Board to act in an advisory capacity to the Program, it should review the nomination process for the Board and the amount of dedicated staffing resources available to the Board.

Finding III-A - The Women's Program was operating without overall planning for its funding allocation and service delivery mix.

The Women's Program had grown through the addition of program areas and contracts, but without an overall plan or policy foundation guiding the process. Consequently, the Program had focused on maintaining the programs it had inherited, and had not developed a regular process for prioritizing programs, reviewing its funding allocation, or selecting services providers. This allowed for the continued funding of existing contracts but not for initiating new programs or reallocating the service mix.

The audit recommended that the Community Services Division and the Women's Program continue to develop policies and guidelines for periodic review of program priorities and funding within the Women's Program.

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